

Senator Max Baucus
2012 National HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) Conference
December 13, 2012

{Remarks as Prepared for Delivery}

Thank you, Tom, for the kind introduction. And thank you for your dedication to making the Rocky Mountain West a safer place for our kids and grandkids. I read your bio, and boy was it impressive.

Did you guys know Tom earned two purple hearts?

And not only has Tom dedicated his life to service, but he and his wife Denise have passed that spirit of service on to the next generation with their two children – one in law enforcement, and the other a school superintendent.

The world could use more folks like Tom.

Folks like all of you who have dedicated your lives to service.

And those who couldn't be here, including Montana members of the Rocky Mountain HIDTA board -- Missoula Police Chief Mark Muir, Billings Police Chief Richard St. John, and U.S. Attorney Mike Cotter.

If you ask Mike, he'll tell you that serving as Montana's 39th U.S. Attorney is the best job he's ever had. Why? Because, Mike says, "It is an absolute pleasure to work every day with men and women, who have committed their lives to public service, making our communities safer and better places to live."

Mike is talking about all of you. Folks like Amanda Gondek, an intelligence analyst with Rocky Mountain HIDTA in Colorado. I understand Amanda will be named Outstanding Intelligence Analyst at tonight's banquet. And from what I hear, Amanda, you've earned it. Congratulations.

"Many of you know me, and you know I'm a HIDTA guy. I am passionate about this program, because I am passionate about Montana. And I have seen firsthand what a difference HIDTA can make.

In 1999, a Youth Behavior Risk Survey found nearly 14 percent of Montana High School students had used meth at least once. It was frightening.

I started traveling around to Montana schools talking to kids about the devastation of Meth.

I asked the students to raise their hands if they knew someone affected by meth. Without fail, half the hands in the room went up.

It was a crisis. Lives were destroyed. Our children were dying.

That's when I started really digging in and learning about the HIDTA Program and the great work it was doing across the country.

Montana was one of only nine states that didn't have HIDTA. That didn't sit too well with me. Our communities were nearing a point of desperation. They needed our help.

So, I flew the Drug Czar at the time, Barry McCaffrey, out to Billings.

100 people came. Dozens more teleconferenced in from Miles City, Bozeman, Havre, Butte, Missoula, Great Falls, and Kalispell. Mr. McCaffrey agreed, we had a crisis on our hands.

But then, like a lot of things in this town, politics gummed it up.

Our efforts stalled in the transition to the new administration in 2001. But lucky for Montana, even Drug Czars require Senate confirmation.

So, I got a commitment to add Montana to the HIDTA program – and John Walters got confirmed to take over.

I continued doing my school visits. And one day in 2004, I met a kid who changed me forever.

I was talking to students at Lewis & Clark Middle School in Billings. At the end of my presentation, one kid stuck around, waiting alone in the corner, until everyone else had gone. His name was Danny.

We started making small talk. I asked him how his grades were and he started to cry. Danny was struggling in school. His mom was addicted to meth. And he was put in foster care. Very sadly, Danny's mother later died.

It broke my heart and lit a fire under me. A fire that fueled me in the fight against gutting HIDTA in 2005. A fire that still fuels me today.

Every time I fight for HIDTA I remind myself I am fighting to protect Montana children from the pain I saw on Danny's face that day in 2004.

Since then, HIDTA has delivered enormous success for Montana.

In Operation Green Angler, our Eastern Montana Task Force targeted a trafficking ring distributing hundreds of kilos of marijuana. They arrested and indicted seven ringleaders -- putting the bad guys behind bars where they belong, instead of on streets selling drugs to our kids.

On the other side of Montana, the Missoula County Task Force targeted a multi-state operation funneling drugs through Montana and Washington. We're talking serious bad guys with ties to Chicago and Las Vegas.

The case required 15 agencies to work together with task forces in four states. It's a perfect example of how HIDTA fosters cooperation to produce results.

Because they were able to work together, police caught nine of the drug ring's biggest criminals. They seized a quarter million dollars in cash, 16 hundred marijuana plants, and 180 pounds of marijuana.

Now, if you'll indulge my bragging on Montana just a few moments more, I can't highlight success stories without recognizing the Missouri River Task Force –Rocky Mountain HIDTA's Rural Drug Task Force of the Year.

The Task Force covers six counties – including Lewis and Clark County, home to our state capital and the ranch where I grew up.

The task force works with agencies spread across 16,000 square miles. I don't know how many of you are familiar with rural areas. But Tom can tell you, that's big. So big they work out of two offices, 100 miles apart – one in Helena and one in Bozeman. And from end to end, they do it all.

In 2011 they made 151 felony arrests. They are well on their way to exceeding that this year.

They've helped take down local, multi-state, and even international, drug trafficking rings.

Thanks to HIDTA success stories like these across Montana, the number of high-school students who have used meth is down from nearly 14 percent in 1999 to three percent last year.

That's an incredible 11 percent drop. It's something worth bragging about. And I know many of you have similar success stories all across the country. Pat yourselves on the backs.

Still, our work is far from over. Montana students were asked about prescription drug abuse for the first time in last year's youth survey. More than 18 percent admitted to using prescription medication without a doctor's prescription. Director Kerlikowske has called this the silent epidemic.

As we look toward the challenges ahead, I want you to know, I've got your back. That fire Danny lit under me eight years ago is still burning as strong as ever.

I understand it takes funding to produce results. I know every \$1 we invest in HIDTA produces a \$96 return. And I won't be bashful about spreading the word on Capitol Hill during the appropriation process next spring. [smile]

The spirit of cooperation and coordination is the core of HIDTA's mission. It's about teamwork. And I am honored to do my part for the team.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to make this world a safer place for our kids to grow up. Thank you for the incredible work you do every day.
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